



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ASKS CONGRESS TO RENEW VOTING RIGHTS ACT

On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors called on Congress to update Section 4 of the Civil Rights Act to enable the Department of Justice to review changes in voting laws that threaten the ability of citizens to cast a ballot for candidates of their choice.

The 1963 March on Washington was a watershed event that set the stage for Congress to enact the Voting Rights Act of 1965, giving the federal government the power to enforce the 14th, 15th and 19th Amendments to the Constitution.

But earlier this summer, on June 25th, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, a divided Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act as unconstitutional. Section 4, known as the coverage formula, identifies the regions of the country that permit the U.S. Department of Justice to review and pre-clear changes to voting laws within those jurisdictions that may have a discriminatory impact or effect.

Testifying before the board on the importance of maintaining strong voter protection laws were local and nationally recognized civil rights leaders, including Rev. James Lawson Jr., a key tactician and teacher of nonviolence who worked closely with the Martin Luther King Jr., Raphael Sonenshein, director of the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at California State University, Northridge, Thomas Saenz, president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Virginia Lee, of the Advancement Project, Eugene Lee, Voting Rights Project Director, Asian Americans

Advancing Justice – Los Angeles, Rick Davis, Regional Director, Lambda Legal and Lola Ungar, Vice President and Action Chair, League of Women Voters. The motion, sponsored by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Gloria Molina, sends a message from the largest county in the nation that a revision of the Voting Rights Act must be done by Congress.

“Nobody should ever use voter suppression as an ordinary tool of politics,” said Sonenshein. “If those who represent California make clear that the Voting Rights Act, admired and supported by both parties, must be made whole, this will send a message that will resound across the nation.”

Saenz said that the Voting Rights Act played a central role in diversifying Los Angeles County government as well.

“The composition of this board changed, in my view, for the better and helped to ensure representation of the entirety of the county and its diversity,” noted Saenz.

Chairman Ridley-Thomas emphasized that the freedom to vote is a centerpiece of democracy.

“The hallmark of a democratic society is the healthy exchange of views,” said Ridley-Thomas. “We want to make sure that those who wish to participate do participate.”

And Lawson noted that civil rights are entwined with voting rights.

“At this stage of the game in the United States we should have national and local leadership committed to the universal right to vote,” he said. “This motion asks Congress, Republican and Democrats alike, to move swiftly so that this right is not abdicated in many parts of the country.”

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